

**MARRIAGE STRATEGIES IN CATALONIA
FROM THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY:
A CASE STUDY**

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130

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RESUM

Aquest article examina algunes estratègies matrimonials, així com costums socials i hereditaris realitzats per una família troncal catalana al llarg de tres segles. S'ha utilitzat la reconstrucció de famílies de la població, des de 1608 a 1935 conjuntament amb el ric arxiu d'aquesta família. L'examen mostra que les estratègies matrimonials vetllaven per la reproducció biològica i social principal objectiu de les famílies benestants catalanes. Aquest objectiu està estretament relacionat amb el manteniment i/o increment del patrimoni familiar en forma de terra de conreu. Al mateix temps, s'observa que les dones eren la clau de volta de les estratègies matrimonials. Podien aportar dots quantioses i constituïen la mare de l'hereu o la pubilla que continuaria la casa. Les dones cabaleres, estratègicament casades, teixien importants xarxes de relacions socials molt convenients per a la seva llar de naixement.

RESUMEN

Este artículo examina algunas estrategias matrimoniales, así como costumbres hereditarias y sociales realizadas por un hogar troncal catalán a lo largo de tres siglos. Se ha utilizado la reconstrucción de familias de la población, desde 1608 hasta 1935 conjuntamente con la documentación que guarda el rico archivo familiar. El examen muestra que las estrategias familiares iban encaminadas para que la reproducción biológica y social se realizara siguiendo los objetivos trazados por las familias troncales. Estos objetivos estaban estrechamente relacionados con la conservación y/o incremento del patrimonio familiar en forma de tierra de cultivo. Al mismo tiempo, hemos observado que las mujeres eran la piedra angular de las estrategias matrimoniales. Podían aportar ricas dotes, y ellas eran la madre del heredero o heredera que continuaria la casa. Las mujeres no herederas estratégicamente casadas, tejían importantes redes sociales muy convenientes para su hogar natal.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine quelques stratégies de mariage, ainsi que les coutumes sociales et d'héritage, adoptées par un ménage de famille souche en Catalogne pendant plus de 300 ans. La reconstitution des familles du village, de 1608 à 1935, ainsi que les riches archives de la famille elle-même, ont été utilisés. Cet examen particulier montre que les stratégies du mariage menant à une reproduction biologique et sociale de la famille ont été les objectifs principaux des familles souches catalanes. Cet objectif était étroitement lié au maintien et/ou à l'accroissement de l'héritage familial, principalement en termes de terres arables. En même temps, on a observé que les femmes étaient la pierre angulaire des stratégies de mariage. Elles pouvaient procurer de riches dotes et c'est à travers elles que naissaient l'héritier ou l'héritière qui poursuivrait la lignée. Les femmes qui n'étaient pas héritières entretenaient des réseaux de relations sociales qui étaient commode pour leur ménage de naissance.

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on some marriage strategies, together with inheritance and social customs, performed by a stem family household in Catalonia over three hundred years. The family reconstitution of the village, from 1608 to 1935, together with the rich archives of the family itself, were used. This particular examination shows that marriage strategies leading to biological and social family reproduction were the main goal of the well-to-do Catalan stem families. This goal was closely linked to the maintenance and/or increase of the family heritage, mostly in terms of arable land. At the same time, we have observed that women were a cornerstone of marriage strategies. They could bring wealthy dowries, and also through them was born the heir or heiress who would continue the house. The women who were non heirs, wove important networks of social relationships which were very convenient for their birth household.

CONTENTS

1.- Introduction	1
2.- The stem family in Catalonia	3
3.- The Community of Sant Pere de Riudebitlles	5
4.- Marriage Strategies of the Rafecas-Rius Family	6
5.- Conclusion	22

TEXT FIGURES

1.- First marriage of Antoni Rafecas Oller (1627-1649)	8
2.- Second marriage of Antoni Rafecas Oller (1650?-1662)	9
3.- Third marriage of Antoni Rafecas Oller (1665?-1679)	10
4.- Marriage of Joseph Rafecas Esteve (1701-1725)	12
5.- Marriage of Margarida Rafecas Tort del Patiet (1730-1760)	13
6.- Marriage of Joseph Rius Rafecas (1765-1812)	15
7.- Marriage of Pere Rius Sellarès (1797?-1842)	16
8.- Marriage of Pere Rius Respall (1823-1883)	18
9.- The family of Pere Rius Almirall (1867)	19
10.- Marriage of Pere Rius Almirall (1867-1918)	21

MARRIAGE STRATEGIES IN CATALONIA FROM THE SEVENTEENTH TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: A CASE STUDY*.

*"The most important principle of all our inheritance and family law
is the preservation of the patrimony"*

Josep Faus i Condomines, 1907

1.- Introduction

Marriage strategies leading to family biological and social reproduction were the main goal of the stem family households in Catalonia. This goal was closely linked to the maintenance or increase of the family inheritance, mostly in terms of arable land. 'The house', that in Catalonia means family household, is located at the centre of this system.

The aim of this paper is to analyze some marriage strategies together with inheritance and social customs of Catalonia¹. This will be carried out through an analysis of the matrimonial behaviour of a stem family of Sant Pere de Riudebitlles during three hundred years (from seventeenth to nineteenth centuries). We will show how this family achieved their main biological and social reproduction goals. Our inquiries uses the techniques of

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¹ L. Ferrer-Alòs, *Pagesos, rabassaires i industrials a la Catalunya central*, Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat (Barcelona, 1987), 569-646. X. Roigé-Ventura, 'Cicle familiar i transmissió de la propietat: els Fabregat', *Arxiu Etnogràfic de Catalunya* 6 (1988), 61-86. A. Barrera, *Casa, herencia y familia en la Cataluña rural*, Alianza Universidad (Madrid, 1990).

L. Ferrer-Alòs² and A. Fauve-Chamoux³. As D. S. Reher remarked⁴: 'The only way to flesh this out adequately is to look at the system from inside out, in terms of the way individual families sorted out their destinies within the context they had inherited..... it would also be most interesting to be able to observe succession strategies of families according to their concrete demographic constraints such as number, age and gender distribution of their offspring surviving past early childhood'.

P. Laslett coined, first in 1972 and later in 1983⁵, a typology for the analysis of households. He defined a household⁶ as a domestic coresident group, where people with or without family ties live together sharing the main meals⁷. The Laslett household classification has been widely used by researchers. However, the Laslett classification has had some critics⁸ who object its static approach to family and household analysis. Our view is that the domestic coresident group analysis should be dynamic, that is to say, we should study the household by observing its different stages, and considering the social, economic and historical framework of its geographical area. This framework helps us to determine the logic of family behaviour and the various strategies which a family might pursue in order to achieve a particular goal. We believe that these aims do not stand in contradiction to the Laslett typology.

² L. Ferrer-Alòs, 'Familia, Iglesia y matrimonio en el campesinado acomodado catalán (siglos XVIII-XIX). El mas Vila del Soler', *Boletín de la Asociación de Demografía Histórica* IX,1 (1991), 27-64.

³ Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, 'Les structures familiales au royaume des familles-souches: Esparrros', *Annales ESC* 3 (1984), 513-528.

⁴ David S. Reher, *Perspectives on the Family in Spain, Past and Present*, Clarendon Press, (Oxford, 1997), 60 and 64.

⁵ Peter Laslett, 'Introduction: the history of the family' in P. Laslett and R. Wall eds, *Household and family in past time*, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge, 1972), 1-89. Peter Laslett, 'Family and household as work group and kin group: areas of traditional Europe compared', in R. Wall ed., *Family forms in historic Europe*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, 1983), 513-563.

⁶ Household (English), ménage (French), llar (Catalan), hogar (Spanish).

⁷ 'According to the definition which has been recommended as an international standard a household consists of a group of individuals who share living quarters and their principals meals'. (Multilingual Demographic Dictionary, 110-3, p. 17).

⁸ L. Berkner, 'The stem family and the development cycle of the peasant household', *American Historical Review* 77,7 (1972), 398-418. David .S. Reher 'La importancia del análisis dinámico ante el análisis estático del hogar y la familia. Algunos ejemplos de la ciudad de Cuenca en el siglo XIX', *Revista de Investigaciones Sociológicas (REIS)* 27 (1984), 107-135. L. Ferrer-Alòs, 'Família i indústria tèxtil en un poble del Baix Llobregat. Navarcles, 1936', *Miscel.lània d'Estudis Bagencs* 6, Centre d'Estudis del Bages (Manresa, 1989), 133-163. Barrera, *Casa, herencia y familia*.

2.- The stem family in Catalonia

The predominant household pattern in Catalonia was the patrilocal stem family⁹. It follows a juridical system which comes from Roman law¹⁰ and strictly controls the transfer of properties from one person to another. It was defined by Frédéric Le Play in 1871¹¹ as a pattern in which the eldest son (*hereu* in Catalan) or, in the absence of a son, the eldest daughter (*pubilla* in Catalan)¹², inherited all his/her father's holdings. The key to succession was a donation called *heretament* in Catalan, made in the marriage contract¹³ whereby the parents promised their estate to their chosen heir¹⁴. The prospective heir spent his or her youth working with the parents, and later on brought his or her spouse into the household and supported the parents in their old age.

The siblings of the heir could remain in the family home, as long as they were not married. However, when they married, they would have to leave the parents' home, and

⁹ Stem family 5b; 5b+5a; 5b+5a+4a, Laslett, *Introduction*, (1972), 31. A. Fine-Souriac, 'La famille souche Pyrenéenne au XIX siècle: quelques reflexions de méthode', *Annales ESC* 32, (1977), 478-487. A. Fauve-Chamoix, 'Le fonctionnement de la famille-souche dans les baronnies des Pyrénées avant 1914', *Annales de démographie Historique* (1987), 241-262, have studied the stem family in the South of France, I. Dubert, *Historia de la familia en Galicia durante la época moderna, 1550-1830*, Ediciós do Castro (A Coruña, 1992) in Galicia, F. Mikelarena, 'Las estructuras familiares en la España tradicional: geografía y análisis a partir del Censo de 1860', *Boletín de la Asociación de Demografía Histórica* X, 3 (1992), 63-82 in Navarra, E. Garrido-Arce, 'La imposible igualdad. Familia y estrategias hereditarias en la Huerta de Valencia a mediados del siglo XVIII', *Boletín de la Asociación de Demografía Histórica* X, 3 (1992) 83-104 in Valencia, W. Douglas, 'The Basque Stem Family Household: Myth or Reality?', *Journal of Family History* 13 (1988), 75-89 in the Basque Country, C. Brettel, 'Nupcialidad en un pueblo de la provincia del Miño, 1700-1970', *Boletín de la Asociación de Demografía Histórica* II, 2 (1984) 2-19 in the North of Portugal, Berkner, 'The stem family' (1972), 398-418 in Austria, R. Andorka, 'Pre-industrial household structure in Hungary' in Wall ed., *Family forms*, 281-308 in Hungary; B. Moring, 'Marriage and social change in south-western Finland, 1700-1870', *Continuity and Change* 11, 1 (1996), 91-113 in South Western Finland, A. Hayami and N. Uchida, 'Size of household in a Japanese county throughout the Tokugawa era' in Laslett and Wall eds., *Household and family*, 473-515 in Japan, amongst others.

¹⁰ G. M. de Brocà, *Historia del Derecho de Cataluña, especialmente del civil y exposición de las instituciones del Derecho Civil del mismo territorio en relación con el Código Civil de España y la jurisprudencia*, Generalitat de Catalunya. Departament de Justícia, (Barcelona, 1985).

¹¹ It is considered that Frédéric Le Play was the first scholar to speak of the stem family in his book *L'Organisation de la famille selon le vrai modèle de toutes les races et tous les temps* published by Alfred Mame, (Tours 1871). It is possible that Le Play became acquainted with the Catalan system of inheritance when he was in Catalonia and in the Basque Country in 1834.

¹² According to J. Goody, 'Inheritance, property and women: some comparative considerations' in J. Goody; J. Thirsk; E.P. Thompson eds., *Family and Inheritance. Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200-1800*, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge, 1979), 10-36, 20 percent of all families only have daughters (p. 10).

¹³ Called *Capítols Matrimonials* in Catalan.

¹⁴ In the marriage contracts there was normally an additional clause nominating the first-born male of the newly-wed couple heir in case his parents should die suddenly without settling their estate (*ab intestato*).

start a new nuclear household or go to dwell in another stem family. Some scholars¹⁵ think that this system has given to Catalan society, more mobile and dynamic individuals, namely *fadristerns* or *cabalers*. In the Catalan language these two words meant the sons who were not primary heirs. These young people compelled to leave the parents' home contributed first to Catalan commercial enterprise and then to its industrialisation. Daughters of the house who were widowed at a young age could go back to the parents' house. In the case of widower sons, the family attempted to remarry them as soon as possible¹⁶.

The father or the widowed mother remained fully in possession of their own property, which they could administer as they pleased until their death. When death occurred, the parents' will usually designated a universal heir¹⁷, though a quarter of the total inheritance, almost always in money, was shared among all legitimate living children (including the primary heir or heiress). In case a son or a daughter were dead, their legitimate offspring were also entitled to this sharing. The married siblings who were not heirs and who had received the dowry (women) or the legitime (men) at the time of their wedding, were not able to contest their parents' will. When there was no will, the inheritance was to be divided into equal shares.

When the parents had neither land nor money to bequeath, the eldest son remained at home with his wife if married, together with single siblings until their wedding. Thus, a stem family with few economic resources was established. As can be seen from the paragraph above, according to Catalan customs no difference existed between wealthy and non wealthy families.

¹⁵ J. Vicens-Vives, *Notícia de Catalunya*, Destino, (Barcelona, 1954); J. H. Elliott, *The Revolt of the Catalans: A Study in the Decline of Spain (1598-1640)*, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge, 1963); A. Cabré, 'La reproducció de les generacions catalanes 1856-1960' (unpublished D. Phil. thesis, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 1989).

¹⁶ A. Torrents, 'Transformacions demogràfiques en un municipi industrial català', (unpublished D. Phil. thesis, Universitat de Barcelona, 1993), 230-241.

¹⁷ We have looked at 151 wills, from 1850 to 1899 kept in the Sant Pere de Riudebitlles parish archive, where more than 95 percent designated universal heir and only in less than 5 percent was the inheritance divided in equal shares (Torrents, 'Transformacions demogràfiques', 259).

This inheritance system¹⁸ aimed at preventing division of holdings in order to safeguard the 'house'¹⁹. Moreover, it was devised to maintain social peace, and to protect weak individuals in society, e.g. children, young widows and old people²⁰.

Accordingly the Catalan family, in the broad sense, reproduced following a customary pattern²¹. However, adaptation was made from one cohort to another in order to attain steady biological, economic and social reproduction, or to experience upward social mobility.

3.- The Community of Sant Pere de Riudebitlles

Sant Pere de Riudebitlles, the seat of the Rafecas-Rius family is a Catalan village located in the *comarca* of Penedès 45 kilometres southwest of Barcelona. Its economy is, on the one hand, agrarian, with irrigated land, and from the seventeenth century vineyards have been an important crop²². On the other hand, also in the seventeenth century, the first paper mill was built, though it was not until the eighteenth century that the paper mills transformed the village economy. All these changes were made possible by the huge quantity of clean water which the village has, and also the fact that it is located near the old and modern main roads.

The population of Sant Pere de Riudebitlles, remained stationary during the seventeenth century and in the first quarter of the 1700's at about 300 hundred inhabitants. However,

¹⁸ 'In the days of Catalan independence, rights of marriage and succession were established by law codes continuously modified by legislation and practise. The reforms of 1716 froze the law code in form, while maintaining its authority. Thus, the Catalan Civil Code, which covers all legal ramifications of alliance and succession, is one of the few institutions of an independent Catalonia to have retained its authority into modern times. As such, law is evoked as a cornerstone of Catalan identity' (G. W. McDonogh, *Good Families of Barcelona. A Social History of Power in the Industrial Era*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1989, 40).

¹⁹ J. Prat, 'Estructura y conflicto en la familia pairal', *Ethnica* 6, (1973), 131-180; E. C. Hansen, *Rural Catalonia under the Franco Regime*, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge, 1977); A. Iszaevich, 'Corporate household and ecocentric kinship group in Catalonia', *Etnology* 20,4, (1981), 277-290; I. Terrades, *El món historic de les masies*, Curial, (Barcelona, 1984); D. Comas-d'Argemir, 'Household, Family and Social Stratification: Inheritance and Labor Strategies in a Catalan Village (Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries)', *Journal of Family History* 13, 1 (1988), 143-163.

²⁰ R. Wall ed., *Family forms*, 28-34; I. Moll-Blanes, 'La estructura familiar del campesinado de Mallorca 1824-1827', in F. Chacón-Jiménez ed., *La familia en la España Mediterránea, siglos XV-XIX*, Crítica, (Barcelona, 1988), 212-257.

²¹ F. Maspons-Anglasell, *La llei de la família catalana*, Barcino, (Barcelona, 1935) and *Derecho catalán familiar*, Bosch, (Barcelona, 1956).

²² The *comarca* of Penedès produces the best wine in Catalonia and the well known Spanish champagne, called *cava*.

from 1725 the population began to rise²³ and nearly tripled in seventy years, growing 1.47 percent per annum during the eighteenth century. This was due to the fact that ten paper mills were built in that period. Population increased to 1,542 inhabitants in the 1849 local list of inhabitants (*padró municipal* in Catalan), reaching its peak in the 1860 census (2,006 inhabitants). Later on, the population declined to 1,671 inhabitants in the 1889 census and remained stationary (1,614 inhabitants) in the 1900 census²⁴.

The Sant Pere de Riudebitlles list of inhabitants of 1849 showed that the stem family households (extended and multiple) totalled nearly 30 percent, and mean household size was 4.8. This roll gives us a snapshot of a moment of economic and demographic rise²⁵. In contrast, the 1889 list of inhabitants with only 26 percent stem family households and mean household size of 4.5 people²⁶, showed a stagnant moment in the number of inhabitants and an acute crisis in Catalan viticulture²⁷.

4.- Marriage Strategies of the Rafecas-Rius Family

Having described Sant Pere de Riudebitlles and its demography, we analyze the marriage strategies and inheritance customs of Rafecas-Rius family over three centuries. This particular family was chosen for investigation because we have both, the family reconstitution of the village from 1608 to 1935 (Torrents, 1993), and also the rich archives of the family itself.

The Rafecas-Rius have been a well-to-do peasant family and a fine example of stem family household throughout the centuries, though due to demographic accidents, the family has not always assumed the stem form.

²³ The population rose to 890 inhabitants in the Floridablanca census, 1787.

²⁴ Sant Pere de Riudebitlles had 2144 inhabitants in the 1996 list of inhabitants (*padró* in catalan).

²⁵ A. Torrents, 'La preponderancia del hogar troncal en una població industrial catalana. Sant Pere de Riudebitlles, 1849', in V. Montojo ed., *Linaje familia y marginación en España (ss.XIII-XIX)*, Universidad de Murcia, (Murcia, 1992), 93-115.

²⁶ A. Torrents and T. A. Cusidó, 'La complementariedad de datos padronales y fichas de familia: un ejemplo de linkage' in D.S. Reher coord., *Reconstituição de famílias e outros métodos microanalíticos para a história das populações. Estado actual e perspectivas para o futuro*, Actas do III Congresso da ADEH (Asociación de Demografía Histórica), vol 1, Edições Afrontamento, (Braga, 1995), 269-291.

The Rafecas-Rius have always exercised indivisible inheritance through the eldest son or the eldest daughter (only one case). The logic of this system was to maintain or if possible to increase their family property. This property should yield, in one generation, suitable assets which would pay the offspring's dowries and legitimes stipulated in the marriage contracts. However, the family had also to gain social prestige in order to achieve local and district-level political power.

The marriage of the daughters, and, to a certain extent, the younger sons, were used to weave family relationship networks in the village and nearby communities, where the family women played a major role in these relationships, sometimes climbing upward on the social ladder. If the marriage strategies were misguided, the effects would lead to an unwanted downward social mobility.

The first heir when our documentary evidence in the parish and family archives commences, was Antoni Rafecas i Oller²⁸ born at the beginning of the seventeenth century. When he was ten years old his father died, his mother also died six years later. At this early age, he looked after two younger brothers with his grandfather Jaume. Antoni had a long life, he died at seventy years old and all his life he struggled to have a male heir to continue the family and the house.

The first wedding (see Figure 1) was arranged with a very young woman²⁹ from another well-to-do peasant family of the same village, where her father had been mayor. According to the marriage contract³⁰ of Antoni Rafecas and Mònica Olivella³¹ she received a dowry of 225 Barcelona pounds, in addition to dresses, linen and jewelry, a remarkable dowry taking into account the time and place. This wedding was very convenient for both families: On the one hand, the bride's family could place in marriage a young orphan girl (sixteen years old) in a wellknown and well-to-do peasant family; at the same time, the groom's family could have a newly-wed couple to continue the 'house'

²⁷ Phylloxera arrived in Sant Pere de Riudebitlles in the year 1889.

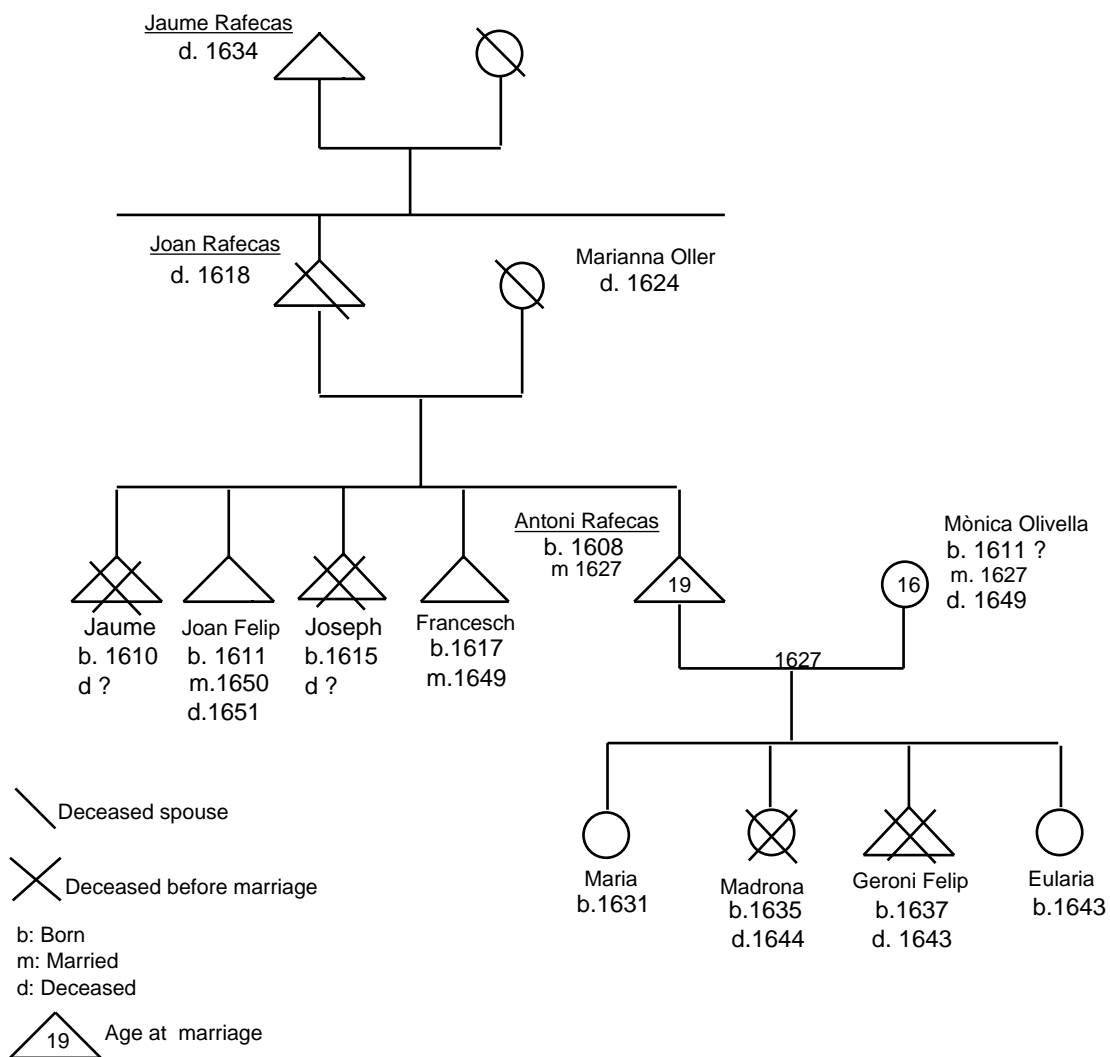
²⁸ He was born in Sant Pere de Riudebitlles in 1608, son of Joan Rafecas and Marianna Oller from Sant Cugat Sessgarriques, ten kilometers from Sant Pere.

²⁹ Antoni was 19 and Mònica 16 years old. The age at marriage for men at this moment in Sant Pere de Riudebitlles was 27.5 years old, and for women 21.7 years old (Torrens, 'Transformacions demogràfiques', 211).

³⁰ J. Faus-Condemines studied the first marriage contracts in his article written in 1902, 'Els Capítols Matrimonials a la comarca de Guissona (Catalunya Segriana)', *Revista Jurídica de Catalunya*. After him many scholars have also studied this juridical instrument in different Catalonia *comarques*, as L. Ferrer-Alòs, *Pagesos, rabassaires i industrials*, in Bages; R. Congost, *Notes de Societat (La Selva, 1768-1862)*, Centre d'Estudis Selvatans (Santa Coloma de Farners, 1992) in La Selva; A. Barrera, *Casa, herència y família* in Osona and Solsonès.

with a young bride (*jove* in Catalan) who had brought along a good dowry and social prestige. The wedding of Antoni and Mònica recomposed the Rafecas' house, constituting with the husband's grandfather and brothers³² a stem family until the wife death³³.

Figure 1. First marriage of Antoni Rafecas Oller (1627-1649)



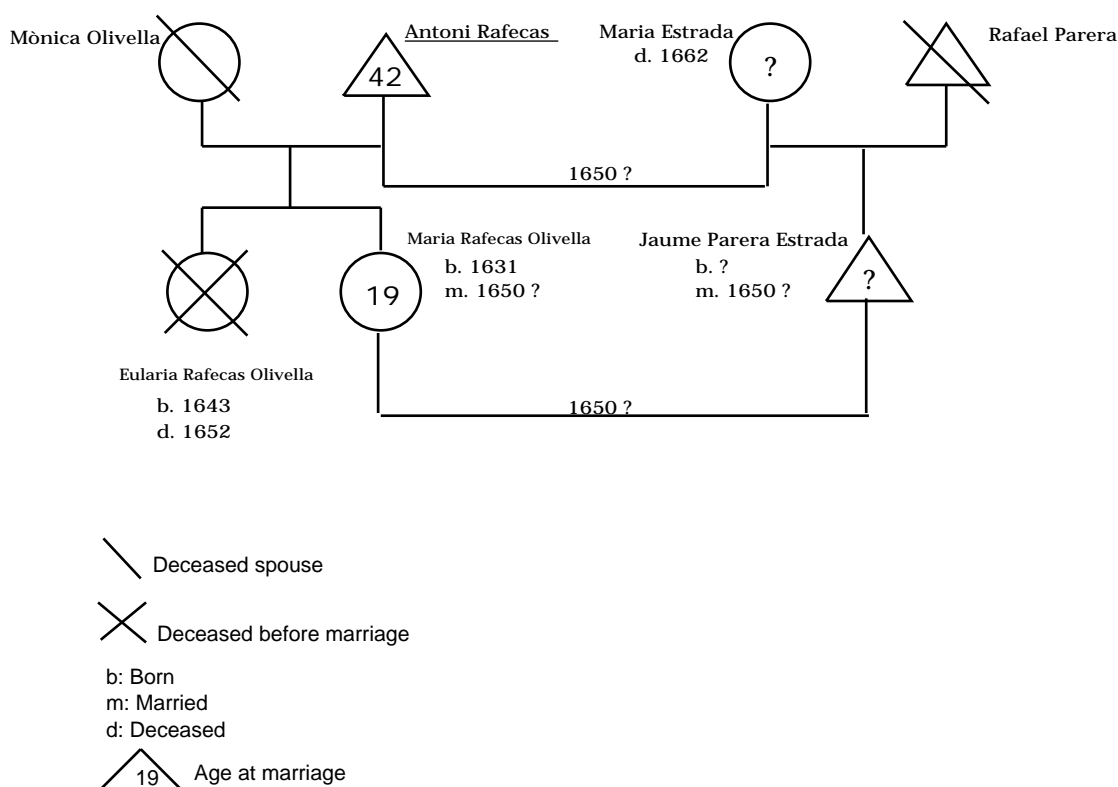
³¹ Both were orphans.

³² In the Rafecas' house three people were living with the young couple: Jaume, Antoni's grandfather and the two siblings namely Joan Felip and Francesch of sixteen and ten years old respectively at the time of their eldest sibling first wedding.

³³ Mònica Olivella's funeral was attended by seventeen priests. This was a sign of social and economic prestige.

Antoni Rafecas was a forty year old widower with two daughters alive, but his widowhood lasted only a few months and he remarried³⁴. The second marriage (see Figure 2) shows a new strategy. The new bride was Maria Estrada, widow of Rafael Parera³⁵, and a double wedding was arranged: in first place the marriage of the parents, and in second place the wedding of the son and daughter. Jaume Parera i Estrada, Maria's son, was the groom and Maria Rafecas the bride, that is to say, the weddings of the widowed parents and the single son and daughter.

Figure 2. Second marriage of Antoni Rafecas Oller (1650?-1662)



Maria Rafecas brought, as a dowry, 500 Barcelona pounds, 78 sheep valued at 75 pounds and most importantly, the promise in the marriage contract that Maria would be nominated heiress (*pubilla*) if there were no male heir.

³⁴ The two sons non-heirs Joan Felip and Francesch got married and left the house, just before the heir's second marriage.

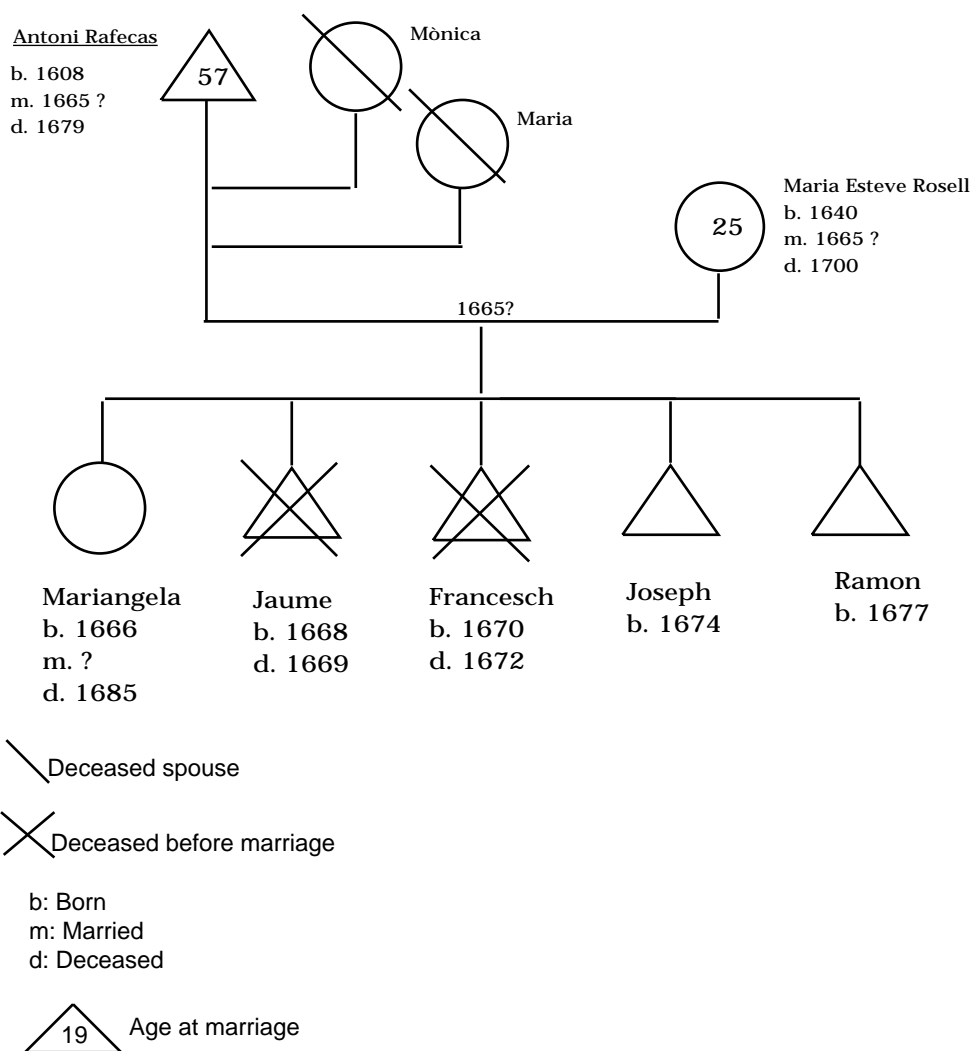
³⁵ Rafael Parera was another well-to-do peasant, who lived in Sant Esteve Sesgarrigues (Sant Jaume d'Anoia) about 5 kilometres from Sant Pere.

At the same time, the widow brought a dowry of 280 Barcelona pounds, more than her predecessor. The older couple did not have offspring and after thirteen years, Antoni Rafecas widower for a second time, inherited his second wife holdings.

Thus, at the age of 54, the heir Rafecas had married twice and was a widower. The weddings had brought to his household dowries and social prestige. His daughter had married a well-to-do peasant, but he had no male heir.

Antoni decided to marry, for the third time (see Figure 3), a young girl from a local peasant family, with the aim of attaining the longed-for male heir. We do not know the exact date of the third marriage. However, given the first daughter's date of birth, it would be around 1665, when Antoni was 57 year old and his young wife 25.

Figure 3. Third marriage of Antoni Rafecas Oller (1665?-1679)



This was a wedding aimed at producing a male to be the house heir. From his last union five children were born, one girl and four boys, only three of whom survived into adulthood. Five years before Antoni's death, Joseph was born, who would be, at last, his heir. Antoni Rafecas had achieved his vital goal: male biological reproduction. Nevertheless he died without being certain that Joseph would survive childhood.

To sum up, Antoni married three times and each time with a well considered strategy to safeguard his house. He had four offspring from his first marriage with Mònica Olivella, of whom only the eldest daughter survived into adulthood. The second marriage was childless, and from the third with Maria Esteve a girl and four boys were born, the two eldest boys died before reaching three years old. Antoni Rafecas had had nine offspring, of whom five died at a very young age and only four married. Household continuity had been in danger from high infant and child mortality. Antoni Rafecas had carried out a very complex marriage strategy in order to achieve his main goals: to have a son alive and not to pay a large amount in dowries and legitimes³⁶.

Joseph Rafecas Esteve, the longed-for heir, was born in the last quarter of the seventeenth century (1674). At the beginning of the eighteenth century, he lived with his widowed mother and his younger brother Ramon, in a nuclear family. The grandparents had died and he was unmarried.

When his mother, Maria Esteve, died in the year 1700, Joseph married (see Figure 4) Maria Tort del Patiet³⁷ a *cabalera*³⁸ daughter of a well-to-do peasant family, who lived in a nearby *masia*³⁹. Maria and Joseph were both orphans when they married. Joseph married at the mean age for men at that time (27 years old). Nonetheless, Maria's age was high (28 years old)⁴⁰, and her dowry 145 Barcelona pounds rather scanty⁴¹. However, the economic and social significance of this marriage in the next generation can be seen.

³⁶ The family had to pay only one legitime and two dowries.

³⁷ The Tort del Patiet, Maria's grandparents and uncles, had died from bubonic plague in 1652.

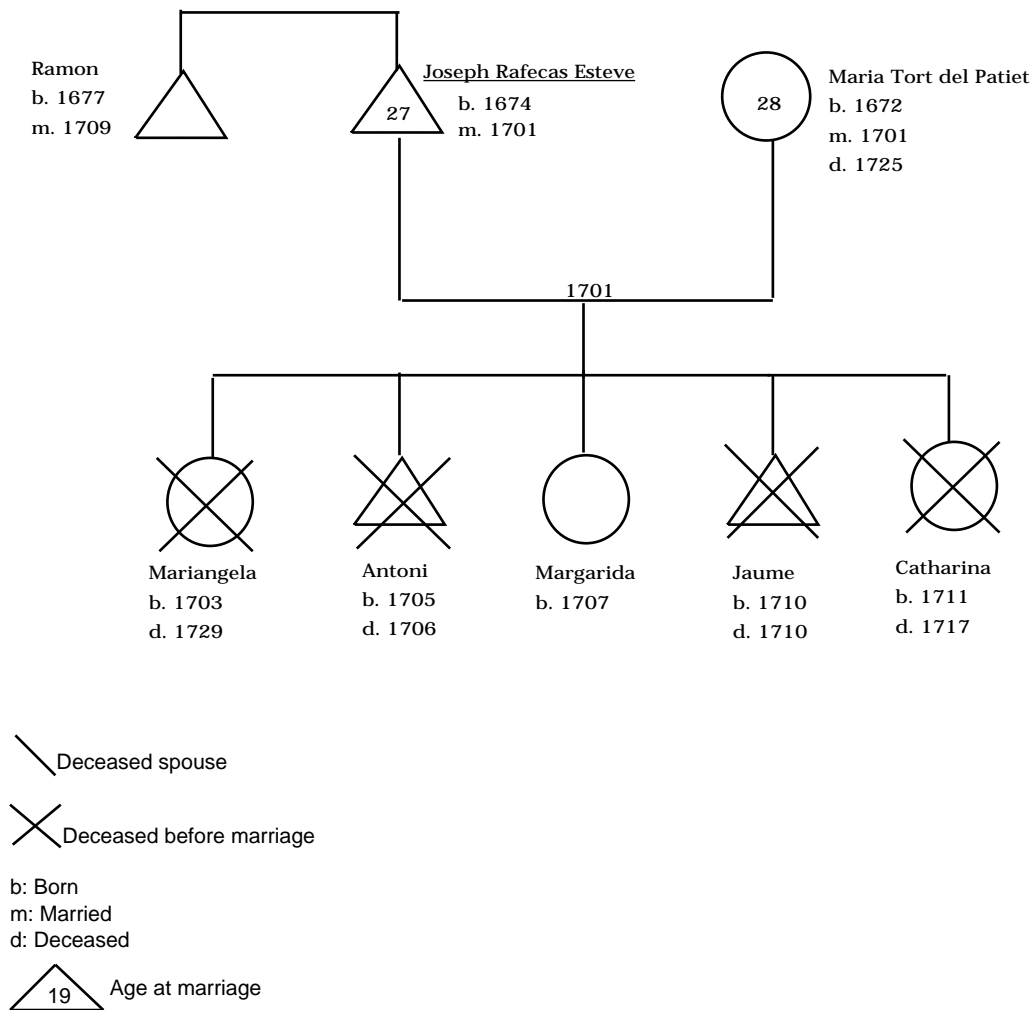
³⁸ *Cabalera* in Catalan is a daughter non-heiress.

³⁹ *Masia* is a Catalan country house.

⁴⁰ The mean age at marriage for women in Sant Pere de Riudebitlles was 22.2 years old and for men 27.8 at the beginning of the 1700's.

⁴¹ A very scanty dowry if we compare with the 500 Barcelona pounds of her sister in law Maria's dowry.

Figure 4. Marriage of Joseph Rafecas Esteve (1701-1725)

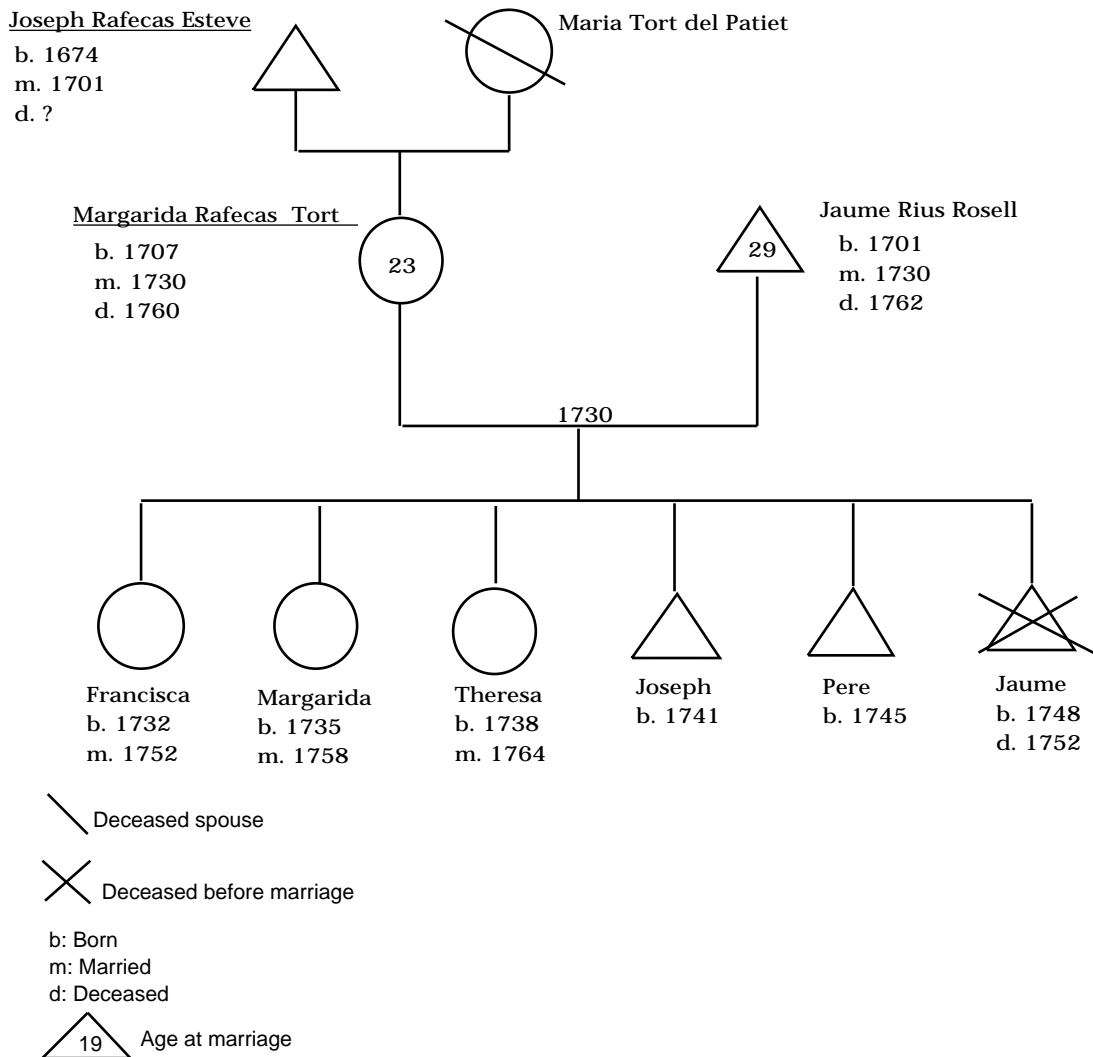


Joseph Rafecas and Maria Tort del Patiet had five children, three girls and two boys, of whom the only ones who survived were the eldest daughter Mariangela (who died unmarried at 26 year old) and Margarida the only offspring and universal heiress (*pubilla*).

A month after her eldest sister's death, Margarita married (see Figure 5) Jaume Rius Rossell a male non-heir son of one of the richest local peasant households, namely the Great House (*Casagran* in Catalan). We could not find the marriage contract of Jaume and Margarida and we could **not ascertain** Jaumes's legitime. Nevertheless, we do know that Margarida in 1733 was nominated universal heiress of her unmarried uncle Geroni Tort del Patiet, with the right to be buried in the church, where only the rich could be

buried. From this moment the Rafecas family ascended in the social ladder and due to a wife who had brought quite a scanty dowry to the house!

Figure 5. Marriage of Margarida Rafecas Tort del Patiet (1730-1760)



When Jaume and Margarida married (1730) a stem family household was constituted with her father Joseph Rafecas, a widower of 56 years old. The couple had very good luck with their offspring, since only Jaume the youngest boy died at four years old. The three sisters received dowries of 150 Barcelona pounds each and Pere, the son, remained at home bachelor. Thus, while the house had paid about 450 Barcelona pounds in dowries, they were able to keep the fadrister's legitime and, furthermore, they received an inheritance from a former union.

Margarida Rafecas Tort del Patiet would be the only heiress (*pubilla*) in three centuries⁴². With her, the surname Rafecas was lost, but was retained as the house name⁴³.

Joseph Rius Rafecas, the first heir who changed the surname⁴⁴ married in 1765 (see Figure 6), when his sisters were already married and his parents had died. The house was again without a couple to assure the biological reproduction. The bride selected to marry Joseph Rius was Francisca Sellarès i Puigdengoles the eldest daughter (female non-heiress) of a builder's family. According to marriage contract, she brought as a dowry 300 Barcelona pounds, together with two bride's boxes full of linen and dresses. The dowry was twice as much as that of the daughters of the house. According to L. Ferrer-Alòs: 'In the matrimonial market, women's value were defined by their dowry and, depending on that, the marriage could take place in one social group or in another'⁴⁵.

This union was profitable for both families: the Rius-Rafecas brought social prestige, and the Sellarès enriched by the building fever of new paper mills and new houses, brought an adequate dowry⁴⁶.

Joseph and Francisca had nine children though only one girl and three boys survived childhood. Of these, we know only about the dowry that Francisca brought to her second marriage, 600 Barcelona pounds, double her mother's dowry, and in addition, linen and dresses. It is a pity that we are not given information about the amount of the legitimes paid to the non-inheriting sons Jaume and Francisco in his marriage contracts, in order to know the amount of money paid to the offspring who were not heirs. At any rate, the Rafecas-Rius paid only a dowry and two legitimes in the last quarter of the eighteenth century due to high infant and child mortality.

⁴² In the Rafecas-Rius household there were six heirs and only one heiress in three centuries.

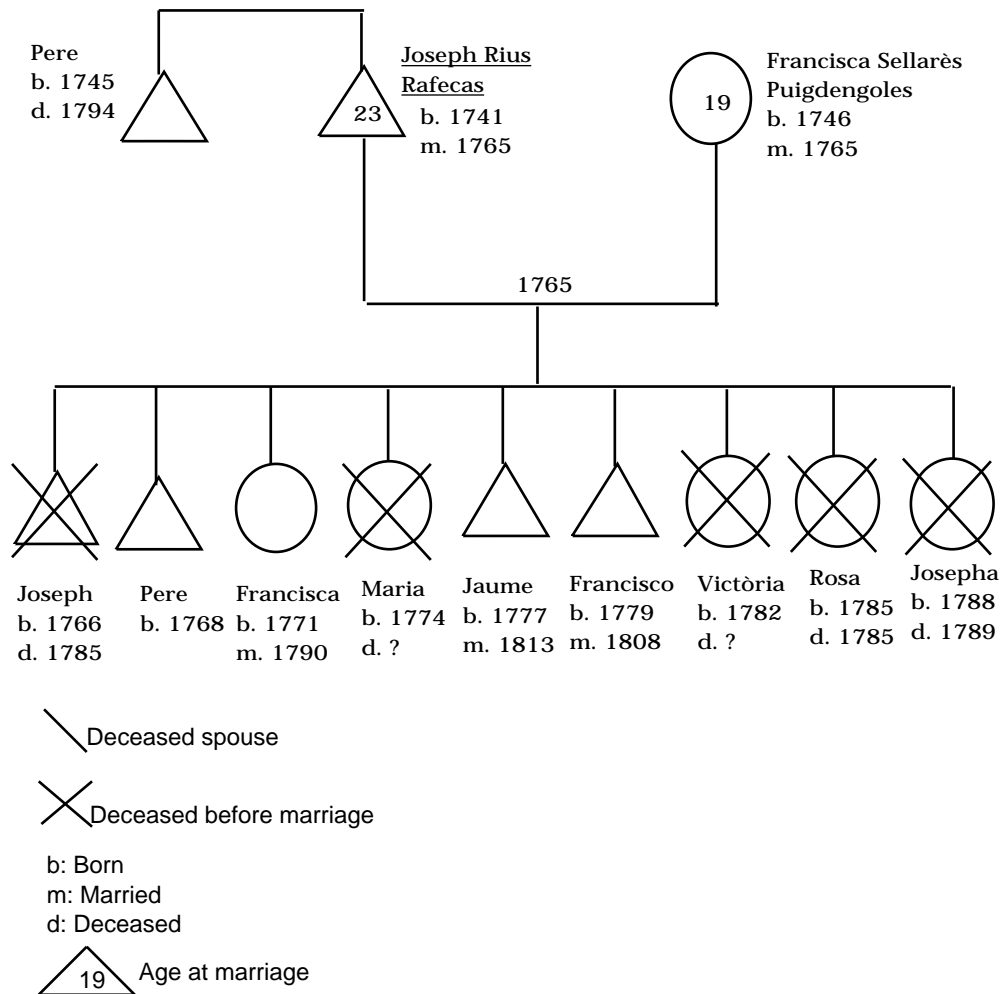
⁴³ The very rich families with social prestige, did not lose the family name, even when, they had an heiress.

⁴⁴ In Spain people have two surnames, one belonging to the father and the other to the mother in this order. However the surname handed on to the next generation is always the father's.

⁴⁵ L. Ferrer-Alòs, *Pagesos, rabassaires i industrials*, 600.

⁴⁶ During the XVIII century the Sant Pere de Riudebitlles population tripled and 10 paper mills were built (J. M. Madurell-Marimon, *El paper a les terres catalanes. Contribució a la seva història*, Fundació Salvador Vives i Casajuana, vol II, Barcelona, 1972, 820-876).

Figure 6. Marriage of Joseph Rius Rafecas (1765-1812)



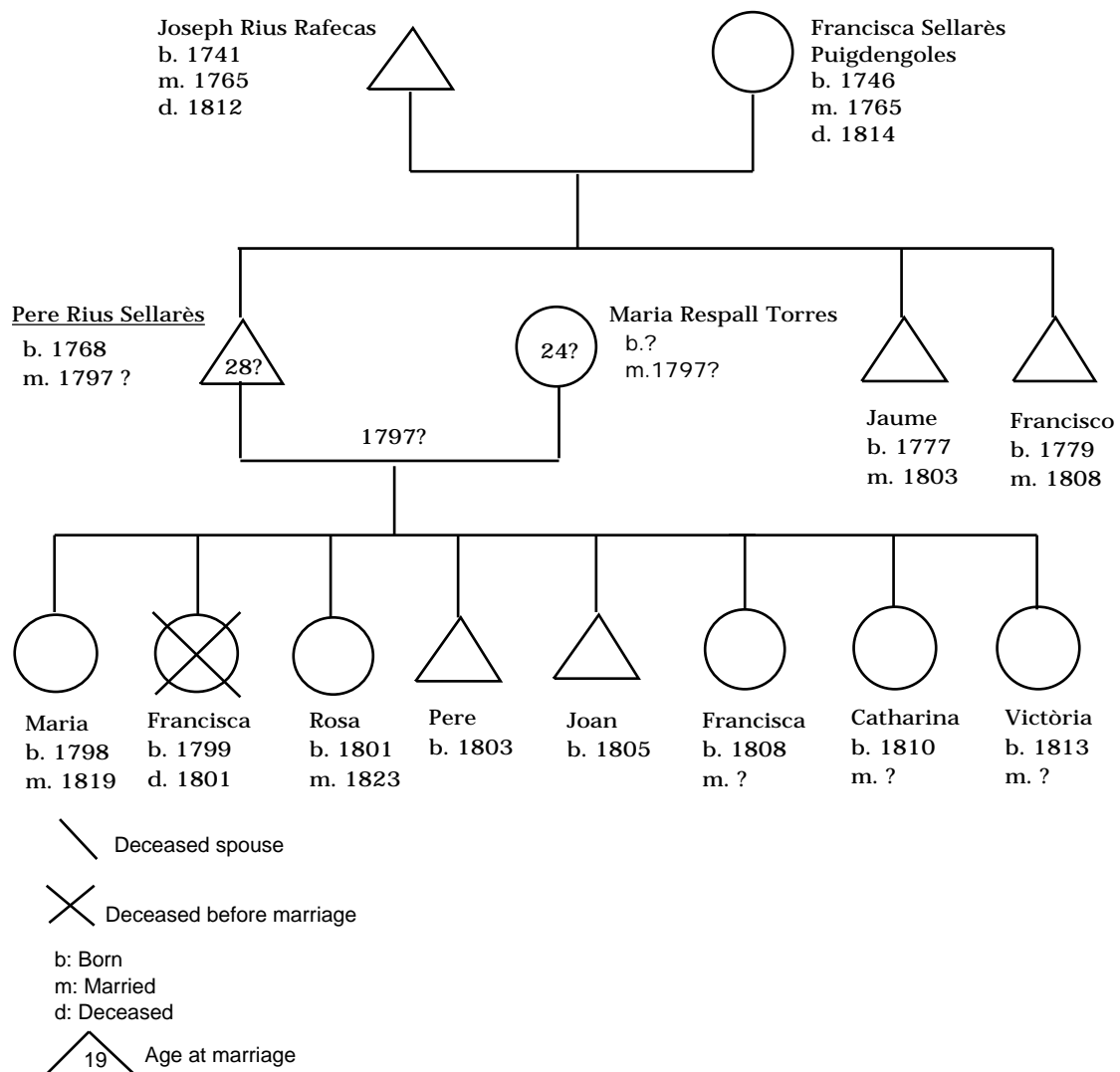
The fifth heir Pere Rius i Sellarès married Maria Respall i Torres (see Figure 7). The bride was a daughter non-heiress from the *Mas*⁴⁷Respall de Renardes, located in Pla del Penedès a nearby village. We do not know the wedding date, or the marriage contract and the dowry. However, we think that the wedding was celebrated at the end of 1796 or at the beginning of 1797⁴⁸. This couple married in the middle of the economic crisis at the

⁴⁷ *Mas* is a country house in Catalonia.

⁴⁸ The newly-wed had the first daughter, Maria, 31 October 1798. The couple was married in the parish church of Pla del Penedès where the parish archive was burned at the beginning of the Civil War (1936).

end of the eighteenth century⁴⁹. The new bride was chosen from a well-to-do peasant family: in a time of crisis, land and established peasant families, represented security.

Figure 7. Marriage of Pere Rius Sellarès (1797?-1842)



The wedding day of Pere and Maria, was rather exceptional, because it was the first time that the parents of the groom and the bride were all present at the ceremony. Furthermore,

⁴⁹ P. Vilar, *Catalunya dins l'Espanya moderna*, Edicions 62 (Barcelona, 1964) and J. Nadal, *La població espanyola s. XVI a XX*, Ariel, (Barcelona, 1984), 122-123.

these parents survived to become grandparents. For more than fifteen years⁵⁰, the Rius-Rafecas home sheltered a complete stem family with two couples (multiple household) and their children. The increase in the adult life expectancy made this great change possible. We are talking about the nineteenth century.

The couple Pere Rius i Sellarès and Maria Respall bore eight children and seven of whom survived to marry. Maria, the eldest daughter, married first (1819)⁵¹; she had one of the largest dowries, 500 Barcelona pounds and the trousseau. Rosa who married just after her brother the heir (1823), had only a dowry of 300 Barcelona pounds and the trousseau. Francisca (1828) and Catharina had a dowry of 350 Barcelona pounds and one trousseau each. Nevertheless for the wedding of Victòria, the youngest child⁵², money was exhausted, and her dowry was a plot of irrigated land with a value of 600 Barcelona pounds and the trousseau. Land as dowry was not good for the family: They needed to retain the whole patrimony, their basic economic resource⁵³. The *fadrister* Joan Rius i Respall, when he married in 1839, had a legitima of only 200 Barcelona pounds, some furniture and the trousseau, altogether of less value if we compare with his sisters' dowries⁵⁴. The family had to pay a large sum of money in five dowries and one legitime, double that of the previous generation.

The family Rius-Rafecas, despite their cash difficulties, was achieving social and political prestige. Pere Rius i Sellarès was nominated in the year 1814 town councillor, later on in 1825 mayor, and in 1828 received the title of 'Procurador Sindic'⁵⁵.

⁵⁰ Joseph Rius Rafecas died in 1812, Francisca Sellarès died in 1814 and the last male non-heir Francisco married and left the house in 1808.

⁵¹ The family patrimony had only eleven years to accumulate money to endow their children. From 1808 when the last son of the former generation married, until 1819 the year of Maria's wedding were years of problems. It was the period of the Napoleonic wars.

⁵² Victòria had no children from her first marriage and if she were a childless widow, her dowry had to go back to her parents' family. Surely this was the main aim of her second marriage with her 19 year old brother-in-law, while she was a widow of 30. Victòria had children with her second husband and her dowry could be bequeathed to her offspring. Victòria, in 1858, after the death of her second husband, could exchange the plot of irrigated land for its monetary value, 600 Barcelona pounds, and she became the offspring with the best dowry and the heir home could maintain the whole patrimony.

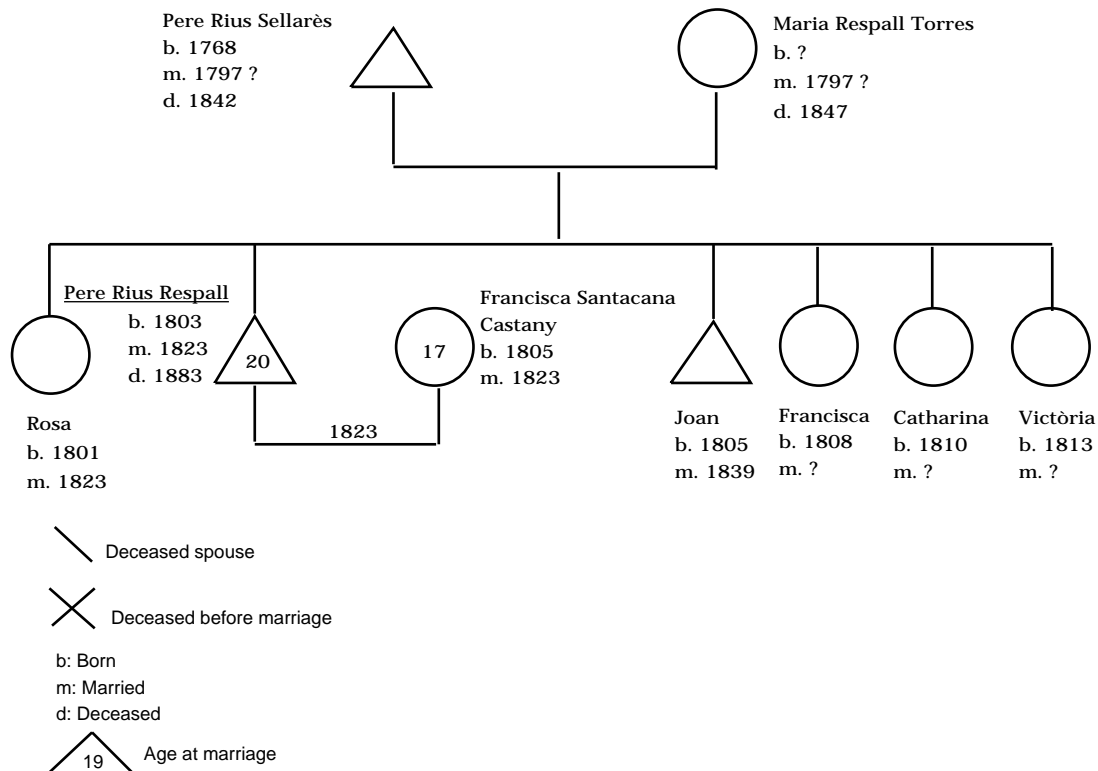
⁵³ 'In an agrarian society, land had a great value as a basic economic resource, and also as a means of family identity, the main goal of all families was to pass on the family holdings entirely', (M.A. Gomila-Grau, 'Familia y derecho. La transmisión de la herencia en Mallorca durante los siglos XIX y XX' in X. Roigé coord., *Perspectivas en el estudio del parentesco y la familia*, Actas del VI Congreso de Antropología, Tenerife, 1993, 191-208).

⁵⁴ L. Ferrer-Alòs argues that the male legitime was lower than the female dowry. However, more research is needed to prove this point (Ferrer-Alòs, *Pagesos, rabassaires i industrials*, 591).

⁵⁵ Joseph Rius Rafecas, Pere's father, was nominated town councillor in the year 1782. The nominations are kept in the family archives.

In 1823, Pere Rius Respall the sixth heir, married Francisca Santacana Castany (see Figure 8), non-inheriting daughter of a wholesaler family from Vilanova i la Geltrú⁵⁶, which did business with America.

Figure 8. Marriage of Pere Rius Respall (1823-1883)



This was one of the most profitable and strategic of the family's marriages. When they married, the groom was 20 years old and the bride 17, a very young age⁵⁷. Francisca's dowry was high, 1200 Barcelona pounds, some chests of drawers, and the trousseau. This was the best dowry ever to come into the Rius-Rafecas family. In the marriage contract of this couple, the bride's dowry was minutely listed and also the groom's father promised that his eldest son Pere was to inherit all his holdings. The wedding ceremony, which took place in Sant Pere in 1823, was attended by the couple's four parents. The house would continue to shelter a stem family with ancestors and collaterals, as in the previous generation.

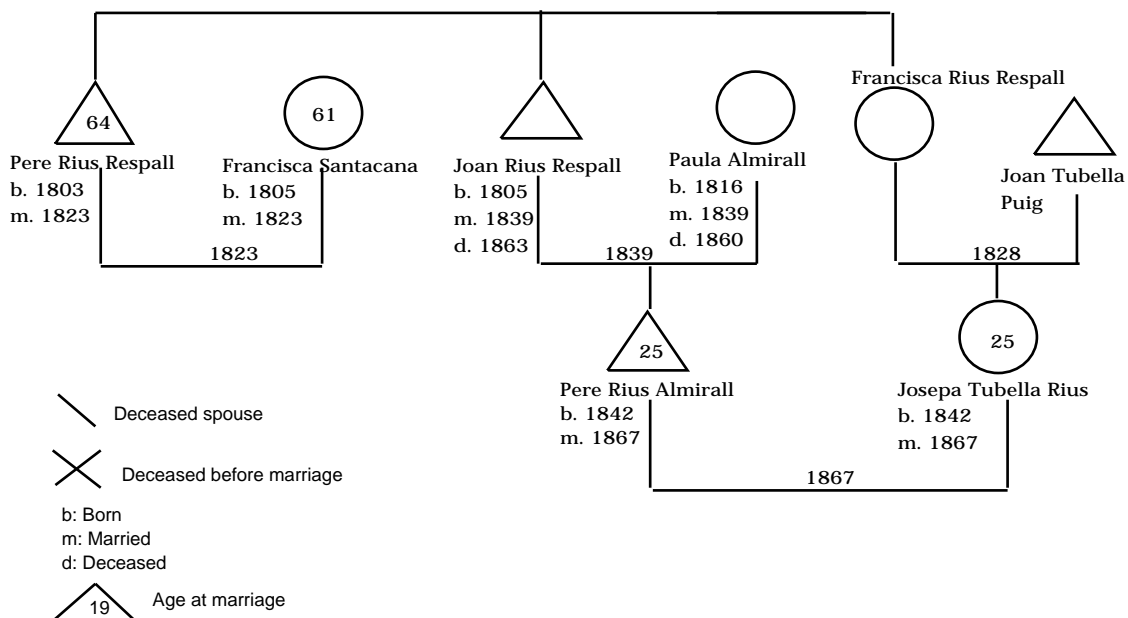
⁵⁶ Vilanova i la Geltrú is a small port on the Mediterranean coast, 30 kilometres from Sant Pere.

⁵⁷ At that time (1823) the grooms and the brides married at a mean age of 23 years old.

However, this couple had a great problem, they were childless. Pere Rius and Francisca Santacana constituted a nuclear household in the 1849 list of inhabitants. The house was again without an heir. This was a new situation that had never occurred before. They had to find a solution to this problem, and to look for a suitable heir for this rich patrimony.

The solution would be a new marriage strategy: they nominated as heir (1867) an orphan⁵⁸ nephew Pere Rius i Almirall, whose surname was the same as that of the family. He had to marry a niece whose surnames were Tobella i Rius, two first cousins, both grandchildren of the house.

Figure 9. The family of Pere Rius Almirall (1867)



Pere Rius Almirall was adopted by his uncles (see Figure 9) and nominated their heir. He brought to the marriage a *escreix*⁵⁹ of 100 *escuts*. Meanwhile Josepa Tobella i Rius brought a dowry of 1113 *rams* and 100 Barcelona pounds for the trousseau, paid by Pere

⁵⁸ The new heir's father, Joan Rius i Respall, was a 56 year old widower, when he remarried (1861) Maria Cols i Mata, a rich widow who brought a dowry of 900 Barcelona pounds, a chest of drawers, two bride's boxes and the trousseau. However, Joan did not enjoy his new marriage for very long. He died two years later (1863) without seeing his son become heir of his parents' home.

⁵⁹ The *escreix* is a voluntary donation that the husband makes to his wife, which compensates for the bride's dowry. In theory this is to help the family expenses, according to the economic system of goods separation (Dictionary of Enciclopèdia Catalana)

Rius and Francisca Santacana, they had also paid the cost of the consanguinity exemption.

A newly-wed couple (1867) would come into the house to continue the lineage (see Figure 10). The seventh heir Pere Rius i Almirall and Josepa Tobella had only three children⁶⁰, of whom only two reached the age of twenty. Josepa Tubella i Rius had the first child Francisca 19 months after the wedding. However, the interval and that of the next child Pere was five years, a very long interval; surely there had been some difficulties or perhaps a miscarriage. In contrast, the interval between the second and third child Joan was only 16 months, a mean interval for woman who breastfeed⁶¹.

The eldest daughter and the eldest son, were baptized Francisca and Pere in honour of their uncles, while the younger son was christened, Joan, in the name of his two grandfathers. Pere, the heir, had as godfather and godmother the uncles Pere Rius and Francisca Santacana.

Josepa Tubella had her last child at 33 years old, before the end, in theory, of her reproductive period. They did not follow the family tradition of large families. In the 1860's the voluntary fertility control in Sant Pere de Riudebitlles began⁶². Did they practise it?. We can not know. However, infant and child mortality was decreasing and by the second half of the nineteenth century a small number of children in the family could survive and secure the biological reproduction.

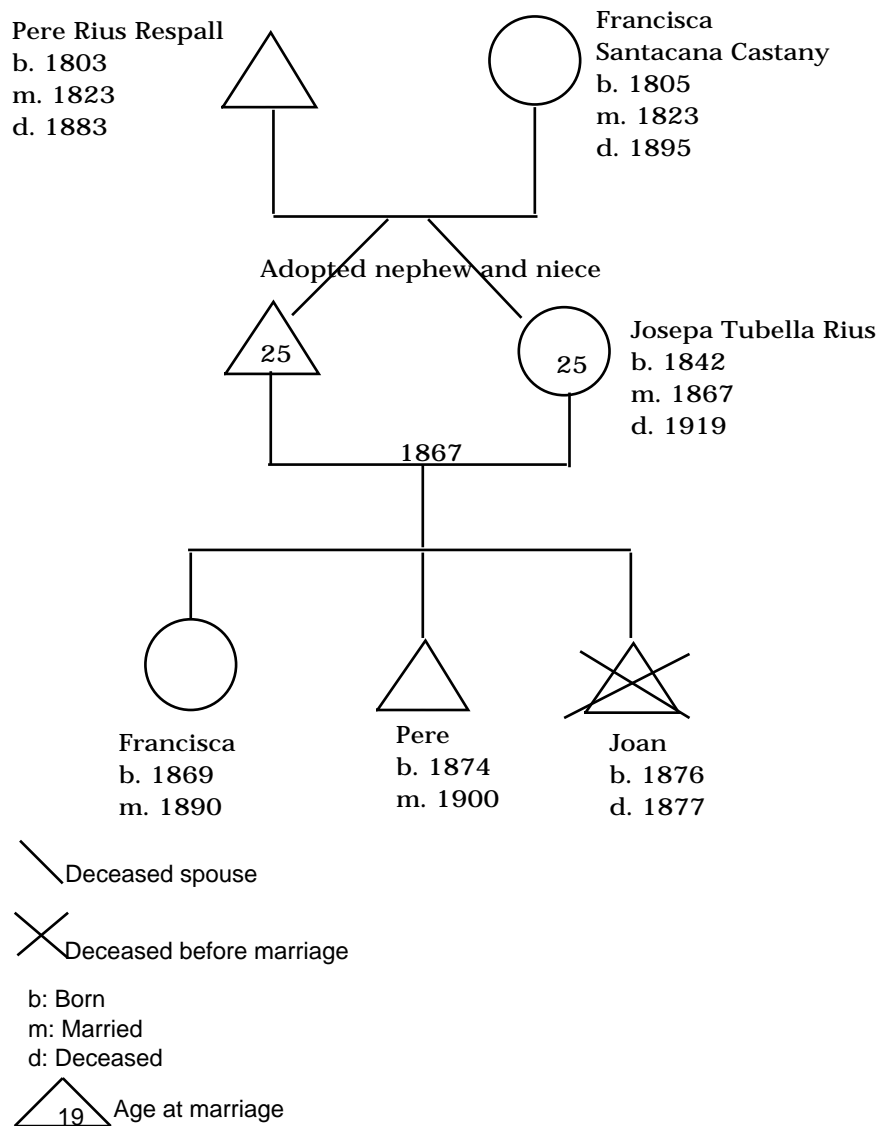
Pere Rius Almirall and Josepa Tubella had one son and one daughter who survived them, and with their aunt Francisca Santacana constituted a stem family in the 1889 list of inhabitants. They had achieved their biological and economic goals: the house had an heir and had only to pay a single dowry. Francisca received 5000 *pesetes* equivalent to 1,880 Barcelona pounds, a very large dowry at that time (1890).

⁶⁰ Pere Rius Almirall's parents bore six children, of whom only four survived the childhood.

⁶¹ Breastfeeding ranged between 18 to 24 months. 'Weaning could take place after a child's second birthday, though some time between 12 and 20 months was more likely' (David S. Reher, *Town and country in pre-industrial Spain. Cuenca, 1550-1870*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, 113).

⁶² Torrents, 'Transformacions demogràfiques', 304-382.

Figure 10. Marriage of Pere Rius Almirall (1867-1918)



Was it the payment of dowries and legitimes which encouraged the well-to-do families to have less children, and, perhaps the behaviour of the prestige families which served as the model for other people?.

5.- Conclusion

Marriage strategies leading to biological and social family reproduction were the main goal of the well-to-do Catalan stem families. This goal was closely linked to the maintenance and/or increase of the family heritage, mostly in terms of arable land. Three or four times each century the dowries and the legitimes to the house offspring were paid using part of the money yielded by the exploitation of the land. Generally, the family wills would only ratify the agreements in the marriage contracts.

The first heir studied, Antoni Rafecas Oller, was born in 1608, and became an orphan at 16 years old. He lived with his widower grandfather and two younger brothers,⁶³ until his first marriage at 19 years old. During his long life he had to struggle in order to achieve the goals of all well-to-do peasants: to maintain or to increase the inherited patrimony and the social prestige of his house and to have an heir to succeed to his position.

Social reproduction was achieved by the first and second marriages, whereas the biological male reproduction was only achieved in his third marriage. However, Antoni did not survive to see his heir reach adulthood. The family holdings were to provide funds for three offspring. Nevertheless, the stem family with two couples, was not created because of the high mortality and the low life expectancy.

The second heir Joseph Rafecas Esteve, whose father died when he was 5 years old, married and had all his offspring in the first decades of the eighteenth century, during the most severe mortality crises of the three centuries. Therefore it is not surprising, that only one daughter, the *pubilla* survived. On the one hand, the family did not have to pay anything to other children and could increase the patrimony. On the other hand, the family lost their surname, Rafecas, because the *pubilla*'s husband was a man from a rich peasant house.

The fourth heir Josep Rius Rafecas had to endow only three offspring because of high infant and child mortality. The house succeeded in endowing three offspring in each generation, with the exception when a woman was the only heiress. The money generated by the family holdings had been enough to marry the house's offspring with grooms and brides of a similar social group. Thus, the Rafecas-Rius family had achieved another of its goals.

For the first time, we found a complete stem family, with two couples, in the household of Pere Rius Sellarès, the fifth heir. Parents could see nearly all their offspring grow up

and marry and also the birth of the grandchildren. The stem family, which has old roots, seems only to have become common with two couples in the nineteenth century. Low life expectancy made this type of family difficult to achieve in former times.

However, at that time, in the first quarter of 1800's, child mortality rates in Sant Pere de Riudebitlles began to decrease⁶⁴. Large number of offspring survived into adulthood requiring support: Pere Rius i Sellares, with seven offspring, had to provide five dowries and one legitime, this was double the endowment of former generations. For this reason, the youngest daughter's dowry was a plot of irrigated land. This was a huge problem: if the patrimony was divided, would be less money to pay dowries and legitimes and the family would go very quickly down the social ladder.

The solution to avoid this decline was with the wife of the sixth heir Pere Rius Respall. The new bride Francisca Santacana, brought a dowry of 1,200 Barcelona pounds, the best dowry ever to come into the house, much higher than the dowries of the house's daughters. This dowry came from business in America.

Even well-to-do peasant families who produced many survivors faced difficulties in raising cash sums for marriage portions. One solution might be fertility control. Yet even within lineages fertility varied, Pere Rius Respall, the sixth heir, was childless, in contrast, his sibling Joan Rius Respall had six children, four of them lived and married. From one generation to the next the number of children decreased from eight to six. The mother was 39 years old when her last child was born. Was it a question of chance? Or did Joan, the male-non-heir, learn by experience from his low legitime?

In the last generation under observation, the last marriage strategy was, perhaps, the most interesting. One nephew, with the surname Rius, was adopted by his uncles and was nominated seventh heir with the condition that he marry his first cousin, also a niece, endowed by their uncles. The continuation of the house was thus ensured. This couple had only three children, of whom one died in infancy, and the house only had to pay a single dowry.

As we have observed, women were a cornerstone of marriage strategies. On the one hand, they could bring wealthy dowries, also through them was born the heir who would continue the house. On the other hand, the women who were non heirs, the *cabaleres*, wove the important networks of social relationships. In this family, it was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that the wife lived to be a grandmother, and as a

⁶³ In Catalonia the stem family is the most important household. Hence the first born male lived with his wife and offspring in the grandparent's house.

⁶⁴ Torrents, 'Transformacions demogràfiques', 172.

widow she obtained the status of usufructuary of her husband's holdings and head of the house, that is to say, a person with great power and influence.

From the analysis of the matrimonial behaviour of one family, we can only draw tentative conclusions. It would be interesting to compare these findings with information from other Catalan families in order to verify whether the picture offered by this family is indeed representative of social and demographic changes in Catalonia during that period.